A room with a beat

Blue Moon Saloon has grown from guesthouse to top music venue

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Mark McKenzie of California was thinking about coming to Acadiana, where his wife was raised, for Festival International de Louisiane. Monday's festival-week appearance by surf-guitar legend Dick Dale at the Blue Moon Saloon and Guesthouse sealed the deal.

Raymond Patrick of New Mexico made a point to be at the Blue Moon on Monday, too, but for different reasons. They represent the two groups that have turned Blue Moon, 215 E. Convent St., into part of Lafayette's tourism and entertainment scene: the audience for great music, and people looking for a European-style hostel experience.

"It's not a money gig," said owner Mark Falgout. "(Musicians) aren't going to get rich playing here. But it's a place they want to play."

Falgout opened the Blue Moon in September 2001. After his grandparents — who were French speakers — died, Falgout went to France to study the language. He returned to France frequently over the next four or five years, often staying in the student traveler's best friend:

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the hostel. Youth hostels offer bunk-bed accommodations in a dormitory setting at an affordable rate.

"Why would someone want to rent a bed in a room with someone else?" Falgout said. "It's kind of a European deal."

But it became a Lafayette deal when Falgout bought an 18th century Acadian-style house that had been moved by mules and rollers to Convent Street from the property where the Gordon Square stands today at Jefferson and Vermilion streets.

Falgout configured the second story into one large dormitory and two private rooms. Later, two more private rooms were added, giving the guesthouse four rooms with private baths, plus two dormitory-style rooms with a total of 16 bunk beds. The bunk beds go for as little as $18 a night. You can rent one of the best private rooms for $70 a night.

Raymond Patrick is a regular Blue Moon Guesthouse customer. Patrick estimates that he's stayed at the Blue Moon 20 times in 13 years, including one three-month stay. The retired engineer tries to spend time in Acadiana between Mardi Gras and the middle of May.

"The people, the music, the food, the happenings," Patrick said, "the little things and the big things — the everyday happenings and the big festivals."

The Blue Moon is a short walk away from Downtown Alive! and Bach Lunch.

"You can do a lot of things inexpensively," Patrick said. "Not that that's the key, but it helps."

Patrick plays a little fiddle himself, and if he sits on the Blue Moon's back porch, an impromptu jam is likely to break out.

"My first guest was an Australian who showed up with an accordion wanting to play some Cajun music," Falgout said.

Falgout had what he wanted: a place a traveler could use as a base for exploring Lafayette and come back to for a beer and some time sitting on the back porch, talking with fellow tourists and local people, too.

It wasn't long before the Blue Moon became one of Lafayette's most popular music venues, too. That shows during the week of Festival.

The place is hopping. After the Dick Dale show, the Blue Moon hosts three nights of Rhythm and Roots shows with Wilson Savoy, Lil Nathan and Roddie Romero. The Blue Moon also hosts the farewell jam Sunday night.

But if the Blue Moon is a unique venue, it isn't necessarily an easy one.

The location makes finding a parking place difficult for a big show. Inside, the stage and dance floor are cramped, and the interior plan of the house often means that when the crowd gets big, portions of the audience are tucked away near a handicap ramp behind the stage, or outdoors on a patio near the bar.

"It's rustic," MacKenzie said, laughing.

"It reminds me of my house when I bought it," said Chris Marlowe, who comes from New Iberia, set foot in the Blue Moon for the first time Monday.

"It's kind of this funky honky-tonk style — a place where you've got a little dance floor," Falgout said.

Raymond Patrick of New Mexico, who estimates that he's stayed at the Blue Moon Saloon and Guesthouse 20 times in 13 years, is back this year for Festival International.

"You've got a drop down to the bar. You've got a back porch. You've got a patio. You've got these different areas."

Danny Higginbotham of Opelousas was another Dick Dale fan drawn to the Blue Moon Monday.

"They've got big-name bands here," Higginbotham said. "First-class entertainment."

Mark Falgout, left, opened the Blue Moon Saloon and Guesthouse in 2001, and watched his idea for a European-hostel experience grow into one of the region's top music venues. PHOTOS BY BILL DECKER, THE ADVERTISER